



Compliments of the Hunter Education Program

Happy New Year! We are well underway for a great 2014 in the Hunter Education Program! December and January consisted of lots of planning for events—the Yankee Classic (January 17-19), Free Ice Fishing Festival (January 25), Chief Instructor Meeting (February 8), and instructor award/recognition banquet (*tentatively* April 5). Mark your calendars if you are interested and let us know if you plan on attending. This issue features press releases from the Department, as well as articles written by staff members. If you have input—a question, a picture, or story—please e-mail Nicole.Corrao@state.vt.us

Insights

Fishing Memories

I grew up saltwater fishing on my grandfather's boat. Many mornings I groaned because I didn't want to get out of bed so early (why do we have to wake up before the fish? Do fish even sleep!?), and there were trips I missed completely (I was "too cool" for fishing when I was in my late teens). Looking back on those trips, I am grateful for every minute I spent on that boat.

The sunrise was a watercolor masterpiece, the salami sandwiches were a gourmet meal, and reeling in a fish — any fish was riding a rollercoaster. You get that happy-nervous feeling when you feel the tug on your line, and your adrenaline is pumping as you call out "got one!" That was the cue. My grandfather, uncle or dad would run over in a frenzy, as if that fish was everything. Because in that moment, that fish *was* everything. We would reel it in, and it would flop into the boat with that a wet slap. Hugs all around! When you're ten years old, not much tops the feeling of catching a fish.

The ride home was always a haze. We were all so tired that it was an accomplishment if we didn't fall asleep on the way back. But my cousins and I would wake up when my grandfather proclaimed the dreaded chore to complete before we could go home, "OKAY! WASH THE BOAT!" Wash the boat?! But it is in the water—isn't it automatically clean all the time?

We learned about much more than catching fish on those trips—although my grandfather joked we were drowning the bait more than anything—we learned about responsibility, and that hard work and patience pays off. I learned about the importance and love of family. I am involved in this program partly because of those family fishing days. I hope one day to make memories like this with my own children and to teach the love of the outdoors, and the life lessons that come with it.

Deer Hunting Results Reflect Stable, Healthy Population

The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department says preliminary numbers show hunters took slightly more deer in 2013 hunting seasons than the previous three-year average, reflecting a stable and healthy deer population in the state.

Deer biologist Adam Murkowski says reports from big game check stations throughout Vermont indicate deer hunters had a series of successful deer seasons in 2013. Hunters took a total of 14,116 deer in the state: 3,221 during archery season, 1,706 during youth weekend, 6,711 in rifle season, and 2,478 in muzzleloader season.

“The number of deer taken and the weight of deer measured by biologists indicate that Vermont’s deer population continues to remain in good health,” said Murkowski. “Compared to the average of the previous three years, harvest levels rose during the archery and November rifle seasons and remained roughly level during youth season.”

“We issued fewer antlerless permits for muzzleloader season the past couple of years, resulting in lower muzzleloader season harvests,” said Murkowski. “This decrease in antlerless permits is based on our management goal to promote a slow and steady growth of the herd in many parts of the state.”

Department biologists operated 24 big game registration stations during the two-day youth hunt and 8 stations during the November rifle season. Accurate data on the age, sex, weight, antler characteristics, and overall health from 1,091 deer were collected with assistance from members of the University of Vermont Fisheries and Wildlife Society (UVM-TWS). Biologists and UVM-TWS members also assisted the Department of Health in monitoring for Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE).

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Photo courtesy of Vermont Fish and Wildlife

Deer Hunting Results Reflect Stable, Healthy Population

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According to Murkowski, the primary goal of Vermont's deer management strategy is to keep Vermont's deer herd stable, healthy and in balance with available habitat.

Maintaining an appropriate number of deer on the landscape ensures Vermont's deer and the habitats that support them remain healthy and productive," said Murkowski. "Healthy habitats and stable deer herds are beneficial to the deer themselves, important to Vermont's deer hunters, and they are beneficial to the health of the land and other wildlife."

"Under our current goal of maintaining a healthy deer herd, a stable harvest is a good indicator that we are meeting our management objectives set out in Vermont's 10-year Big Game Plan," said Murkowski. "As long as the deer herd is healthy and responding to our management prescriptions, season totals in any given year may be up or down from the previous year. But the fact that fluctuations are small, rather than major boom and bust cycles, is an indicator that management strategies are working."

Murkowski says the 14,116 deer brought home by hunters during the 2013 deer seasons resulted in Vermont hunters being able to benefit from over 700,000 lbs of lean high protein venison.

The 2013 report on deer hunting seasons with final numbers will be on the Vermont Fish & Wildlife website (www.vtfishandwildlife.com) by early February.

Coyote more likely to make a meal out of moose than we thought: Study

It has long been believed that coyotes were incapable of taking down an adult moose, but researchers have recently discovered that eastern coyotes and coyote × wolf hybrids (canids) have preyed on adult moose in central Ontario. Their findings were published in the Canadian Journal of Zoology.

Researchers Dr. John Benson, a PhD student in the Environmental and Life Sciences Graduate Program at Trent University when he conducted the research, and Dr. Brent Patterson, a research scientist with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources in Peterborough, documented instances where packs of eastern coyotes and coyote × wolf hybrids (canids) were found to have killed moose. Their study involved live capture of eastern coyotes and eastern coyote × eastern wolf hybrids to deploy Global Positioning System (GPS) radio-collars and take blood samples for DNA analysis. The GPS collars delivered highly accurate locations of the study animals (via satellites or cell towers) so the researchers were able to visit these locations during winter to investigate their activities and document predation patterns. The DNA analysis allowed them to determine whether the animals were coyotes, wolves, or coyote × wolf hybrids.

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In the study, four canid packs ranging in size from two to five animals were found to have killed moose. The researchers obtained two accurate ages from moose that were killed by coyotes and/or hybrids: One was very old (20 years) and one was young (20 months). It is believed that younger and older adult moose are probably more vulnerable due to inexperience and deteriorating body condition, respectively.

“Coyotes and coyote × wolf hybrids probably prey on moose opportunistically and only when circumstances are favorable. For instance, when snow is deep and a hard crust forms on top this impedes the ability of moose to travel and gives the lighter coyotes and hybrids an advantage because they can travel on top of the snow,” explained Dr. Benson. “Additionally, we noticed that some of the moose killed by coyotes and hybrids were on steep slopes that may have slowed the moose and created unstable footing. We also found that some of the moose were killed in areas where medium-sized trees were moderately dense, which may have prevented moose from swinging around quickly to fend off predators attacking from the rear or side.”

“Killing of adult moose by eastern coyotes and coyote × wolf hybrids appears to be relatively rare and probably does not pose a threat to moose populations in central Ontario. However, from the perspective of a pack of coyotes or hybrids, killing even a single moose during a winter is very beneficial and goes a long way towards helping them meet their energetic demands. For instance, a pack of two eastern coyotes spent some or all of 18 days feeding on a moose that they killed.”

The authors do not believe the viability of moose populations in central Ontario is negatively affected by this predation, as recent studies have shown that populations in WMU49 and nearby Algonquin Provincial Park are increasing and that both adult and calf moose survival is relatively high.

This research was a collaborative project between the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Trent University and was conducted in Wildlife Management Unit 49 (WMU49) in central Ontario — the area between Huntsville, ON and Parry Sound, ON.

The article “Moose predation by eastern coyotes and coyote × wolf hybrids” by John F. Benson and Brent R. Patterson is published in the Canadian Journal of Zoology.

Direct link to article: <http://www.nrcresearchpress.com/doi/full/10.1139/cjz-2013-0160#.Uta8cLRrtI0>

Hope's Cookhouse

I recently found this really yummy recipe online, and I am definitely making it this weekend! If you don't like spinach, just leave it out (but try to be healthy and eat your vegetables!).

Spinach Venison Quiche

Ingredients:

- 1 unbaked pastry shell (9 inches)
- 1/2 pound ground venison
- 1/2 pound sliced fresh mushrooms
- 1/2 chopped onion
- 1/2 cup chopped green pepper
- 10 ounces spinach
- 4 ounces crumbled feta cheese
- 6 eggs
- 3/4 cup half and half
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon salt



Hope honing her skills.
Photo credit: instructor DJ Rousseau

Directions:

- 1) Line pastry shell with a double thickness of heavy duty foil. Bake at 450F for 8 minutes. Remove foil and bake for 5 minutes longer.
- 2) Meanwhile, in a large skillet, cook the venison, mushrooms, onions, and green peppers for 5-6 minutes or until meat is no longer pink. Drain. Spoon the mixture into crust and top with the spinach and feta cheese.
- 3) In a bowl, whisk eggs, cream, pepper and salt. Pour over cheese.
- 4) Cover edges loosely with foil. Bake at 350F for 45-50 minutes or until a knife inserted near the center comes out clean. Let stand for 5 minutes before cutting.

FAQ with Nicole



Nicole on the range
Photo courtesy of instructor DJ Rousseau

Q: When is the next instructor recognition and awards banquet?

A: We have set aside **April 5th** for the next instructor recognition and awards banquet. Instructors will get a formal invitation in the mail when we have finalized the venue!

Vermont Turkey Hunters Had a Record Year

Vermont wild turkey hunters had safe and successful spring and fall hunting seasons in 2013, according to the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department.

A record 6,968 turkeys were taken by hunters during Vermont's three hunting seasons – the spring youth hunt, the regular May spring season, and the fall turkey hunt.

Young turkey hunters mentored by experienced hunters took 782 bearded turkeys, which are almost always males, during the youth turkey hunt on the weekend before the regular spring season.

Hunters took 5,580 bearded turkeys in the May 1-31 regular spring turkey season.

Fall turkey hunting during October and November produced 606 turkeys of either sex, which was lower than 2012, but still enough to make the 2013 three-season total the highest since Vermont's wild turkey population was restored in the early 1970's.

Vermont's wild turkey numbers increased to an estimated 45,000 to 60,000 turkeys in the fall 2013 population, allowing the expansion of turkey hunting opportunities which now offer hunters the chance to take three turkeys each year statewide.

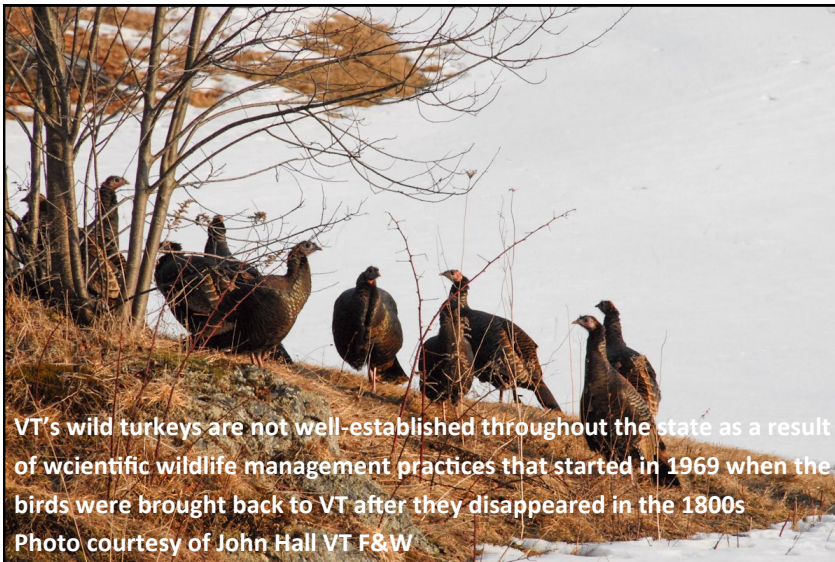
Vermont Fish & Wildlife also reports that no turkey hunting-related shooting incidents were reported for the fourth consecutive year.

Starting in January, 2014 Vermont's wild turkey program will be led by state wildlife biologist Amy Alfieri working out of the Fish & Wildlife Department's Dead Creek office.

"I am pleased that we were able to hire Amy to take over management of one of our premier big game animals is Vermont," said Wildlife Director Mark Scott. "She brings more than eight years of experience working for the department on a variety of wildlife species."

Scott further acknowledged the outstanding work that state wildlife biologist Forrest Hammond has done on the turkey project in recent years.

"Hammond's been our lead biologist the past few years on turkeys and has done an excellent job building relationships with Vermont's sporting groups and the state's various National Wild Turkey Chapters



VT's wild turkeys are not well-established throughout the state as a result of scientific wildlife management practices that started in 1969 when the birds were brought back to VT after they disappeared in the 1800s
Photo courtesy of John Hall VT F&W

in promoting youth hunting and volunteers," said Scott. "The National Wild Turkey Federation is a key reason for our success in establishing this big bird throughout the Green Mountain State."

Hammond will be focusing more of his work on leading Vermont's black bear project.

For more information regarding Vermont's wild turkeys visit Vermont Fish & Wildlife's website at: www.vtfishandwildlife.com.

Vermont Bear Hunters Had a Successful and Safe Season in 2013

The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department reports that bear hunters in Vermont had a safe and successful hunting season in 2013. Hunters took 557 black bears during the 85 days of the two-part “early season” and “late season,” and there were no shooting-related incidents for hunters while pursuing bear.

For the first time, the State implemented an early bear hunting season (September 1-November 15) and a late

season (November 16-24) in order to improve the bear management program. Hunters needed to purchase a special license for the early bear season. Their regular hunting license bear tag was valid for the late season. 2013 also marked a new four-day extension in November designed to stabilize the growth in the population

“The four-day extension was very helpful in achieving our goal of harvesting more bears,” said bear biologist Forrest Hammond. “The 2013 harvest is close to our average annual total of 547 bears over the past ten years. Participation in the early bear season was higher than anticipated, an indication that Vermonters are becoming increasingly interested in hunting this big game animal.”

Hammond said 306 bears were taken during the early season and 251 in the late season that overlapped with the November deer season. Ten percent of the harvest was taken by hunters during the four-day extension of the late season. Two towns had the highest number of bears taken, Montgomery and Sutton, with 11 bears reported in each town. Four bears weighing more than 400 pounds were taken in the state.

“The annual bear harvest typically fluctuates due to food availability and weather that influences how much the bears roam and how soon they den up for the winter,” said Hammond. “The 2013 harvest was less than the previous year when 620 bears were taken.”

Hammond attributes the higher total in 2012 to a large bear population and a shortage of fall foods in the woods that made bears more available to hunters.



Photo courtesy of Vermont Fish and Wildlife

Preliminary 2013 Season Totals for Deer, Bear, Turkey and Moose

These summaries are simply tallies of harvest reports received to date from statewide check stations. These totals do not incorporate or reflect annual variations in weather conditions, hunter pressure, or other factors that may affect harvest numbers.

Final harvest numbers will be reported in the annual harvest reports for each species, available on our website (www.vtfishandwildlife.com) later this year.

White-tailed Deer	To-Date Totals	Previous 3 Year Average
Youth Weekend	1,698	1,720
Archery Season	3,220	2,941
Rifle Season	6,707	6,194
Muzzleloader	2,477	2,941
Total	14,102	13,796
Black Bear	556	518
Wild Turkey		
Spring Season Youth Weekend	782	632
Regular May Season	5,580	4,354
Fall Season Archery	79	108
Fall Season Shotgun	529	968
Total	6,970	6,062
Moose		% Success
Regular	198	55%
Archery	23	45%
Total	221	

Free Ice Fishing Day Festival is January 25th



The VT F&W Dept. will hold an Ice Fishing Festival for kids and others new to ice fishing in celebration of Free Ice Fishing Day on January 25. Photo courtesy of Eric Palmer, VTF&W

To celebrate Vermont's first-ever statewide Free Ice Fishing Day on January 25, the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department and Vermont Sportsman are teaming up to host an ice fishing festival on Lake Champlain. Vermont Sportsman is a group that organizes ice fishing tournaments and educational clinics throughout the state.

The festival will be held at Larrabees Point fishing access area in Shoreham, Vt. Some of Vermont's best ice anglers will be participating in a tournament hosted by Vermont Sportsman beginning at 5:45 a.m. These professional anglers will stick around after the tournament to share their skills and knowledge with new ice anglers in the afternoon.

Events for the public will start at 1 p.m. The festival is free, and families with kids are encouraged to attend. Events include minnow races, free clinics on ice, fishing gear and techniques, and fish identification games, along with prizes and other gear given out to kids. Fish & Wildlife staff will operate a fish fry station to cook fish caught by the participants.

Other refreshments will also be available.

"Ice fishing is one of the most accessible forms of fishing and can be a great way to introduce kids to the fun of fishing," said Shawn Good, fisheries biologist for the Fish & Wildlife Department.

"This festival will demonstrate that ice fishing isn't just about catching fish," said Good. "It's also a great way to spend some time outdoors with kids. You can skate, slide, make a snow fort and have a cookout – all while waiting for the flags on your tip-ups to signal when you've caught a fish."

Free Ice Fishing Day is new to Vermont in 2014 and will be held annually on the fourth Saturday in January.

"We worked with the Vermont legislature to create a Free Ice Fishing Day to encourage individuals, friends and families to try one of the most popular fishing methods enjoyed in Vermont," said Patrick Berry, commissioner of Fish & Wildlife. "Vermonters enjoy ice fishing as a chance to get out together, have fun, and catch a few truly fresh fish to bring home for dinner."

Food and warming huts will be available to keep people comfortable. Participants need not worry about bringing equipment to the festival. The Fish & Wildlife Department will supply all equipment needed for a fun day on the ice. For more information, contact Nicole Corrao by calling 802-318-1347 or emailing nicole.corrao@state.vt.us.

Generous Wildlife Watcher Donates Estate to Vermont Fish & Wildlife Dept.



An East Montpelier woman who loved wildlife bequeathed her estate to the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department upon her death.

Mamie Thurston died last winter at the age of 87. Her home, property, belongings, and financial assets valued at more than \$500,000 are being transferred to the department at her bequest.

Mrs. Thurston was an avid birder and a lover of all wildlife, according to Pat Griffen, estate executor and family friend. “She enjoyed watching the birds at her feeder every winter or watching the deer in her back yard,” said Griffen. “In the end, she decided to leave everything to serve the wildlife that she loved.”

The donation will go to the Nongame Wildlife Fund, which is used to conserve nongame species such as bald eagles, loons, lynx, spiny softshell turtles, lake sturgeon, and many species of bats. The program is funded through a combination of private donations and federal State Wildlife Grants, which have been hard hit by recent federal budget cuts.

“This generous gift will begin to fill in the gaps from our budget shortfalls,” said Steve Parren, director of the wildlife diversity program for the Fish & Wildlife Department. “Mrs. Thurston’s legacy will long be reflected by the species and lands that her donation will help protect.”

Patrick Berry, commissioner of the Fish & Wildlife Department also lauded Mrs. Thurston’s donation. “Through her thoughtful bequest, Mamie Thurston has provided a legacy of nongame conservation that is so highly valued by Vermonters,” said Berry. “This invaluable support will help protect and conserve some of Vermont’s most imperiled species. I encourage others to consider supporting the Nongame Wildlife Fund in their charitable giving and estate planning.”

Funds from Mrs. Thurston’s donation will be met with a nearly three to one match through federal grants.

Vermonters can donate to the nongame wildlife fund directly on line 29 of their tax return or at www.vtfishandwildlife.com, or by purchasing a conservation license plate.

Investigation Leads to Double Arrest for Poaching

Vermont Fish & Wildlife Wardens acted on an anonymous tip that led to the arrest of two Vermont men for poaching on November 8, 2013. Cody Thompson, 20, and Gordon Bills, 23, both of Wardsboro, were charged with possessing illegal deer. Thompson was additionally charged with taking big game by illegal means and Bills with taking a deer using a firearm during archery season.

Wardens visited the house where the two men resided and discovered three deer in their shed. Thompson admitted that during the night of November 3, 2013, he shot a 3-point buck and a doe using a .22 caliber rifle with the aid of his vehicle's headlights. Thompson stated that he acted alone.

The shed also contained a 5-point buck that Bills had previously reported at a check station during archery season, claiming the deer was legally harvested. Upon closer inspection, a wound consistent with a projectile from a small caliber firearm was discovered. Bills later admitted that he killed the deer with a .22 caliber rifle during the archery season.

Both men were cited to appear at Windham County Court on January 21, 2014. If convicted, they could lose their hunting, fishing and trapping privileges for three years. Thompson faces potential fines of \$8,000 for two counts of each charge, while Bills faces potential fines of \$4,000 for one count of each charge. The deer and two .22 caliber firearms were also seized.

"The majority of Vermont's hunters are ethical and law abiding," said Major Dennis Reinhardt of the Fish & Wildlife Department. "A small minority create most of the problems that our wardens address. We apprehended a number of individuals who engaged in poaching this fall, thanks in part to the assistance of watchful Vermonters."



Photo courtesy of Vermont Fish and Wildlife

Vermont wardens continue to rely heavily on confidential information provided by the public. If you witness illegal activity, please alert a Vermont State Game Warden immediately by calling your local State Police Barracks. You can also contact Operation Game Thief at 1-800-75ALERT (1-800-752-5378) or online at www.vtfishandwildlife.com/laws_thief.cfm. Rewards are paid for information leading to an arrest.

Game Cooking Seminar at Sportsman's Show

Here's your chance to learn how to prepare game or fish for the table from experts at the 22nd Annual Yankee Sportsman's Classic being held at the Champlain Valley Expo January 17-19 in Essex Junction.

The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department is sponsoring two seminars on Saturday, January 18th to highlight the significance of game meat to Vermont's rural heritage and the importance of proper game and fish care.

Chef Jimmy Kennedy will offer simple, yet elegant recipes for venison, grouse and fish at his popular game cooking seminar. And new this year, the department is also offering a deer butchering seminar. Eric Holmgren, a professional butcher and state meat inspector, will demonstrate the simple skills and knowledge you need to transform your deer carcass into recognizable cuts for the table.

The seminar on Whole Deer Processing will be held 12:00 to 2:00 p.m. in the Stevens Room. Game Cooking with Jimmy Kennedy will be from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. upstairs.

"Game meat is healthy and delicious," said Hunter Education Coordinator Chris Saunders. "But the road to a delicious meal demands careful processing and preparation. We are thrilled to have professional chef Jimmy Kennedy and professional butcher Eric Holmgren serve as instructors to share their working knowledge of Vermont wild game."

Chef Jimmy, a life-long hunter and angler, is the author of *The River Run Cookbook: Southern Comfort* from Vermont and a spokesperson for Cabot Cooperative Creamery. He is also a professional bass fisherman and co-host of the Lakes Region Fishing Show.

Eric Holmgren owns a professional game butchering business that processes 250 deer per year and has been a state meat inspector since 2005, he resides in Orange with his wife Tammy and their two children.

The Yankee Classic also offers hunters, trappers, and anglers the opportunity to buy their 2014 license and be entered into a raffle to win an Old Town canoe, an electric trolling motor, a hunting rifle, and hunting apparel. People who buy their license online or at the Fish & Wildlife's exhibit at this event will be entered into the drawing. The exhibit is also a great opportunity to talk with department wardens, biologists and other staff.

Waterfowl Blinds Must Be Removed



State Game Warden Dustin Snyder inspects a duck blind on Lake Champlain prior to the February 15 deadline for its removal.
Photo courtesy of VT F&W Carl Wedin

Waterfowl hunters who did not remove their hunting blinds from the waters of the state earlier must do so before February 15 on Lake Champlain or May 15 on inland waters according to a reminder from the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department.

State law requires removal of the blinds before these deadlines in order to protect natural areas and to prevent boating accidents after the ice melts.

“Removal of the blinds and any posts that may be below the surface of the ice is important because of the danger they present when boaters are on the water in the spring,” said State Game Warden Major Dennis Reinhardt.

Reinhardt says wardens have recorded names and addresses of blind owners and will follow up with inspections.

SAVE THE DATE!

Instructor Recognition and Awards Banquet

April 5, 2014

Time & Place: TBA

Sound Off!

This is YOUR newsletter! Have a photo or story you'd like to share? Is there something that's missing in the newsletter? E-mail Nicole.Corrao@state.vt.us with your suggestions, stories, pictures or other input!.

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